
Words of Truth

Hebrews 13:7; 17

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In this study we are going to cover verses out of sequential order as to avoid repetition in a future study. Here is what we are going to study in this article: *“Remember them which have the rule over you, who have spoken unto you the word of God: whose faith follow, considering the end of their conversation... Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief: for that is unprofitable for you”* (Hebrews 13:7; 13:17).

The term translated “remember” [μνημονεύω] is defined as: “To exercise memory, i.e. recollect; by implication, to punish; also to rehearse: — make mention; be mindful, remember. To be mindful of, to remember, to call to mind; to think of and feel for a person or thing; to hold in memory, keep in mind; to make mention of” (Strong’s # 3421). Considering both passages, it is obvious that those who have the rule over us are to be obeyed and thus we are to be mindful of them. What earthly men who teach the word of God, that have been given authority from God, are we instructed to obey?

Elders are the overseers in the local church. That does not mean elders have all authority. We will talk about that momentarily. What it does mean is that elders are the shepherds of the congregation. They feed and protect. When Paul was talking to the elders in Ephesus (Acts 20:17), notice part of what he said: *“Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood”* (Acts 20:28). Notice what Peter wrote concerning elders [a.k.a. shepherds; pastors; bishops]: *“The elders which are among you I exhort, who am also an elder, and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed: Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind; Neither as being lords over God’s heritage, but being ensamples to the flock. And when the chief Shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away”* (1 Peter 5:1-4).

Elders were responsible for overseeing funds intended for needy brethren (Acts 11:27-30). Elders were involved in the instruction of saints even in other congregations (Acts 15:1-35 and Acts 16:1-5). Clearly, the Lord has given elders significant authority. However, that authority is limited. As with all men and women, we are subject to obey the authority of

Christ (Matthew 28:16-20). Whatsoever we do, we must do by the authority of Christ (Colossians 3:17). The church is His body (Ephesians 1:22-23 and Colossians 1:12-20). Therefore, elders are not our supreme authority figures. Jesus has been and always will be the one we submit to above all others (Ephesians 5:23-24 and Hebrews 3:1-6). Having said that, if elders are truly qualified and really doing the work of the Lord; we should be able to follow them.

With the authority elders are to have, they are to use such for teaching. Among the qualifications of elders (I Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:5-9), we see that elders must be able to teach (I Timothy 3:2 and Titus 1:9). (*Note, for an in-depth study on the qualifications of elders, see the following: <https://www.wordsoftruth.net/qualifiedelders.html>). As with all who teach the word of God, elders are supposed to be an example for those being taught by them to follow (I Timothy 4:11-16). Thus, we consider the end of the conversation. The word translated “conversation” [ἀναστροφή] means: “manner of life, conduct, behavior, deportment” (Strong’s # 391). If they are holy and blameless as all elders must be (Titus 1:6), the end of their conduct will be eternal life (I Peter 1:1-17 and II Peter 3:9-14). Let me say also, being holy and blameless is not a higher standard just for elders. All Christians are expected to live up to that same standard (Ephesians 1:3-4, I Thessalonians 4:7, and Hebrews 12:14).

Elders have rule over the flock (I Timothy 5:17). As watchmen for our souls, they have a great responsibility to be aware and to issue warnings as needed and they will answer for how they do so (Ezekiel 3:16-24 and Ezekiel 33:1-16). We can see under the Old Law that watchmen were not always aware and alert (Isaiah 56:10-12). So, we’d be ignorant to wholly trust any man, including elders. If you were to back up and read the context of an earlier reference in this article (Acts 20:17-31), some elders even sought to draw away disciples. Those were elders that the Holy Ghost had appointed. So, while we are to obey the authority of elders and allow them to watch for our souls; we are never to be blind followers (Luke 6:39).

If elders are truly qualified and faithful, we are expected to live in such a way that they may give an account with joy rather than with grief. It is unprofitable to the sheep if the shepherd cannot be joyous in his work. Think about that. What does that mean? Elders give an account to the Lord as we all do (Romans 14:11-12 and II Corinthians 5:10). Yet, not only of themselves but also of their work as shepherds. If in that accounting process elders would report to the Lord that it was grievous unto them to shepherd you; where would that leave you? If their account is “unprofitable” for you, that means it is hurtful to you (Strong’s # 255). While Paul was not an elder, as an Apostle he wanted to see the saints live in a way that in the day of Christ he could rejoice (Philippians 2:14-16). As an Apostle, faithful brethren were his glory and joy (I Thessalonians 2:20). On the other hand, if those he taught were to fall away, he felt as though his labor was in vain (Galatians 4:8-11 and I Thessalonians 3:5). Now with that detail to consider, think about the importance of being mindful and obedient to the lawful words of elders. Don’t cause them grief. Your salvation depends on it!